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## THE MISTAKEN LETTER

### CHAPTER I.

"A letter for Polly?" Why, goodness alive, who can be writing to her! She never had one before in her life, I'll warrant."

Mrs. Sims laid down the bread knife and stretched out her hand. Her husband laid the letter on the table with the address uppermost.

"There it is plain as the nose on your face," he said, resting his open palms on his hips and looking down at the square white envelope.

His wife's curiosity aroused in him a deeper interest in the affair than he had felt as he jiggled along from the postoffice with the weekly paper and this letter in his pocket.

"Smithers ask me if Polly's name was Mary Ann and I told him yes. Sez he: here's a letter for Miss Mary Ann Brown, then and I reckon it's hers; So I took it and there 'tis."

"That's Polly. But who's writing to her? She haint no beaux, and she haint no kin—that is, she don't know none, though I allus said I believed her ma was well connected and had seen better days," Mrs. Sims said turning the letter over.

"Fo' she met up with ole Brown then," Mr. Sims laughed.

"Yes, of course. It won't while she lived with him. But they are dead now, poor things. She was a lady, if he was a sot. Well, well, a letter for Polly! I wish she'd come, it's the most dinner time and all the men will be here." With her eyes wandering often to the letter she moved about the kitchen excitedly.

Along the road came Polly swinging an empty bucket in her hand.

She walked slowly as if the walk had no attractions for her, the end of it promised nothing better.

Her sun bonnet was tied closely under her chin and her face lowered. She had been to carry water to the harvesters.

The traveling minister had overtaken her and was walking by her side.

He was a tall, lank man with a brown, finely wrinkled face and a solemn voice. He was speaking to Polly now.

"I am sorry to find you in this frame of mind, my dear sister Mary. We should always try to be thankful that it is as well with us as what it is. Remember our surroundings have nothing to do with real heart happiness."

"Fiddlesticks," Polly ejaculated elegantly. "I'm sick of all that cant, Mr. Slocum. It won't make me love God any more to think of him as always keeping me down like this."

"Discipline, my sister. The chastening rod."

"No." She brought her foot down with a fierce little stamp, and flashed a fiery look at him from under the rim of her blue sun bonnet. "No," she repeated, her voice low and intense. "God made me as I am. He doesn't expect me to like this life. He knows how distasteful it is to me. I could be happier and better—Pshaw. I hate it all. I'd rather die than go on, only sometimes I believe in the God you have tried to show me and I'm afraid of him!"

"And you have need to be. Your heart is rebellious and wicked."

"I don't care if it is. What has it had to be otherwise? I'm not an idiot, more's the pity. We have only one life—that ought to be glad and joyous. One score of my three is gone—wasted—thrown away—worse than lost. I've never known one happy day since my mother died, and all my life must be spoiled."

She stopped short. The bucket had fallen from her hand. Mr. Slocum picked it up and went along swinging it in his hand. His eyes were bent upon the dusty road.

"I'm afraid you set out with a wrong view of life. I wonder

where you got it. This is a vale of tears, my child. How came you to think that we were meant to be glad and happy in this world?"

"I don't know. I have learned to think of God as a tender, loving father, and naturally he would want us to be happy. I don't think suffering makes people better, and I won't believe that He has anything to do with inflicting it upon us. Yes, I know, as he raised his hand warningly, 'I know what you would say, but I'd rather limit His power than His mercy, so there!'"

They walked along in silence. When they reached the gate the preacher opened it and Polly followed in.

It was not an attractive home, but it was the best Polly had been able to secure after her mother's death. And Mr. Sims and his wife had put up with her drunken father for the sake of the help Polly had been able to render. Now that the poor, unworthy father had gone into another world Polly remained and kept on with the homely, uncongenial work.

She rebelled against the circumstances that had combined to keep her there. It was not that she asked great things of life, only a chance to be glad and happy in her own way.

Mrs. Sims stood waiting in the doorway.

She came down the steps to the preacher. She was not a very religious woman, but she regarded the preacher with a feeling of awe. For a few minutes she forgot the letter.

The preacher greeted her solemnly and gravely accepted the chair she offered.

"I am footsore and weary, sister Sims, and am thankful for the shelter of your home."

"I am sure you are welcome sir—very welcome."

Polly passed on by the door and set the bucket on the wall curb. She unwound the rope from the windlass and began to draw up the cool water.

The minister turned his tired face toward her. The water splashed back into the well with a refreshing sound.

After all there were some sweet, pleasant things in life. He began to wonder vaguely if we are not to blame for the small number of them.

Polly brought him a dripping tin dipper of the cool water. He drank it and thanked her gravely.

She was turning away when Mrs. Sims thought of the letter.

"Here's something for you, Polly," she called.

The girl turned back listlessly, and untied her sun bonnet, and took it off.

The preacher looked up at her as she stood passively waiting. He was sorry that she was so exquisitely pretty. No doubt her beauty made her dissatisfied. And still it was a pleasure to look upon her lovely face with its dark, troubled grey eyes and pretty red mouth, set about with most entrancing dimples. He shook his head as his eyes took in all the beauty of her curly, red-brown hair and delicate complexion that neither wind nor sun could harm.

As he looked at her she smiled a little. There was a flash of white teeth, a little stir among the dimples, and he heard her say: "Something for me?"

And then he watched her as she took the letter, holding it doubtfully in her hand while Mrs. Sims looked on expectantly.

"Thank you," Polly said, and went quietly out of the room.

Mrs. Sims let her hands drop from her hips and caught her breath sharply. The expression of curiosity gave place to one of disappointment.

She had thought so much about the letter that she felt really injured to have it taken away.

"I don't know what it can be. She never got one before. Silas brought that awhile ago from the Post Office. He'd gone to get the 'Review.' It might have been there ever sense last Wednesday. I

wish Polly'd come and tell us the news."

She laughed nervously. She was beginning to feel ashamed of making so much of the letter. The preacher seemed to think so little of it.

He sat looking out into the yard absently drumming on the table with his stiff, freckled fingers.

Mrs. Sims turned her attention to the dinner that was cooking on the stove. As she became more interested in this, she began to feel hurried, and to need Polly.

"It takes a long time for her to get it read. Excuse me, Mr. Slocum, and I'll hunt up Polly. You must be hungry, and the men will soon be in. Why?"

She stopped and held up both hands.

Polly had rushed across the kitchen and was standing before the preacher, her eyes shining and her face aglow. She held the letter in one hand and a narrow slip of paper in the other.

"Look at it," she was saying breathlessly. "Tell me that I am awake. What does it all mean?"

Mr. Slocum slowly took the strip of paper in his hand.

"This," he said gravely, and with only a slight tremor in his hand to show that he was agitated "is a check for \$100. It is in your favor, and—"

"Read the letter. Tell me that I am not dreaming."

He took the letter and Polly sank down on a stool at his feet. Mrs. Sims, again forgetful of the dinner, leaned against the table and listened eagerly.

The preacher read, slowly, deliberately, showing no surprise.

MY DEAR NEECE:—

After mature deliberation I have decided to open my home to you. Blood is thicker than water, after all. If you can put up with an old woman's ways, come to me at once. For your mother's sake you will be welcome.

Only this. We will never mention the name of the cruel man who has ruined your life. Leave your past behind you. Do not forget this. I positively forbid any reference to the past. You will find a check enclosed. Use it for whatever you require. Forgive me for waiting so long. I wanted to be sure of my life. And you must be sure also. If you will promise to give up all of your past and begin anew your life I will leave you well provided for, not because I consider you deserve it, but for your mother's sake.

Your Aunt, Ruth Bascom.

"Poor Dad," Polly exclaimed with a sharp sob. "He didn't mean to ruin my life. He loved me. But I can think of him all ways. Poor, dear Dad."

"Well, well. And so I was right and you have folks after all. You see, Mr. Slocum, Polly don't know her kin."

"This letter, then, is an invitation from an unknown relative?"

"Why, yes. Though I always did say that Polly's ma was somebody."

Polly's face had grown very grave. She had begun to realize the change that was coming to her.

"And so the Lord had not forgotten you," the preacher said, looking at her.

"Polly's eyes filled with tears. 'It is more than I deserve,' she said humbly."

She took the letter and went away to read it all over again.

Mrs. Sims went back to her cooking in a dazed sort of way, and Mr. Slocum resumed his slow, stiff drumming.

Presently Polly came back, her eyes and nose were red, and she moved about nervously and she handled things awkwardly. The men came to the house and ranged themselves on either side of the long table. Mr. Slocum asked a blessing, the plates were helped and then Mrs. Sims cleared her throat and told the news.

Polly was going South to her mother's people, none of whom she had ever seen.

Polly listened as they all talked about it. Two of the men had

come from the South. One of them was from Virginia—the state to which Polly was going. They had wonderful things to tell of the fine old homes and grand old families.

They even knew some Bascoms and doubted not but these were some of Polly's people.

After the men were gone back to the wheat fields and the preacher was resting on the sofa in the little parlor, Mrs. Sims and Polly began to clear away the dinner dishes.

"I shall miss you, Polly, but I'm glad of this streak of good luck. They are not close together in most folks' lives, I can tell you."

Polly made no reply. She had never learned to love the coarse kindly woman who had given her a home when she was homeless.

But somehow a sort of regret took possession of her as she thought of the old, weary life as really quite gone from her. She sat down after awhile, tired and overworked. She was nearly always tired. The flies buzzed about the kitchen and the chickens clucked and cackled in the yard. Mrs. Sims nodded over her mending.

And all the summer days were like this and the winter only added to the dreary discomfort.

Polly was not strong and the weary monotony of it all seemed to be crushing all hope, and joy of living out of her.

A slight movement caused the letter in her belt to rustle softly. Her heart gave a throb that was almost suffocating. She was really going away! In all her life she had never been away from the neighborhood. But once she had lived in a pleasant home. That was before her mother died. The dear, sad faced mother, who had taught her so patiently, and before she had grown old enough to understand her mother's sorrow. She never knew all of it, for her mother had never complained.

And when Polly was only ten years old her mother died. Died suddenly without a precious last word for her heart-broken child. And so the girl knew nothing of her mother's early life, for in a few months the father died also.

Soon every one in the little town knew that Polly Brown, Mrs. Sims' help, was going away to Virginia to live with wealthy relations. And she was tormented with questions that she could not answer.

"I really don't know anything about them," she said to the slim-waisted dress-maker, who was busily showing her fashion plates. "I don't doubt but they are wealthy and fashionable, and it is quite like a romance." Yes, this is the waif for the traveling dress. And you'll need an evening dress and two or three house dresses. I'm glad I'm not busy now. I can soon have you ready," the brisk little woman said.

But getting ready was a very tiresome process to Polly, and she was glad when her trunk was packed and she was saying good bye to Mrs. Sims who wept copiously, with her hat, red hands.

Mr. Slocum had given up his work and gone away, so she was spared the annoyance of having him bid her adieu.

For the last time she passed over the hot, sunny road to the station. Mr. Sims bought her ticket and sent the dispatch she gave him.

"Aunt Ruth ought to know that I am coming," she said.

"I reckon you'll soon forget me and the ole woman," Mr. Sims said as he sat by her, waiting for the train.

"Oh, no. You have done all that has been done for me since mother died, and that is a long time."

"Yes, its ten years. You've been a good girl, but pretty much like a fish out of water. If your fine friends don't do, you'll know the way back."

And then the train rushed in, there was a hurried good bye, and Polly was really gone out into the new life.

How strange it seemed, to be

sitting idle when it was time to be getting dinner.

With a little sigh of genuine comfort she leaned back in the luxurious seat and looked about her with lazy interest.

There was no hint of excitement or curiosity in her manner. No one would have guessed that this was her first journey abroad.

The trim, graceful little figure, in the neat, grey traveling suit, the lovely, high-bred face, the calm repose of manner, and the half haughty indifference to the people and things about her might have belonged to a woman of the world.

### CHAPTER II.

The train stopped at a little station and a beautiful butterfly fluttered in at the open window.

Polly smiled as it poised lightly on a parcel that rested on the seat at her side.

Its quivering wings were new and downy, fresh from the ugly grey cocoon that had held it away from the beautiful world for so many dreary days, just as her hard, narrow life had held her. A thrill of joy trembled through her heart as she realized that she was as free from the old life as the pretty insect was from its narrow prison.

The butterfly spread its wings and soared gracefully through the air. At last it alighted on the back of a seat, the gorgeous, yellow and black of its softly moving wings, shining against the dark green velvet.

A lady sitting near the pretty creature cautiously raised her hand and drew from her hat a long, slender pin. Polly held her breath, bending forward a little.

The lady slowly lifted the pin above the butterfly and then deliberately thrust it through the downy body, pinning the insect fast to the cushion of the seat.

Then Polly saw her turn a smiling face to an astonished gentleman who occupied the seat with her. Then heard her say:

"It is just what I need for my drift of butterflies! You remember they are across the dull blue drapery near my new Psyche. Indeed I believe it was you who noticed the absence of yellow, the finishing color."

"Yes," the man said gravely, "but I had not thought of what the bit of yellow would cost! What a price has been paid for your drift of butterflies!"

"You mean—"

"I mean the slaughter of the innocents," he said, as she hesitated.

She laughed lightly.

"You pride yourself on your well-filled game bag! Fie, Dr. Berkly!"

"At least we can eat the things I kill, and I kill them outright. See how that little thing suffers!"

He drew from his pocket a small glass and the lady looked at the butterfly through it. Her dark face paled, and she turned her eyes away.

The man drew the cruel pin from the small body, and taking the butterfly on his hand held it out of the window.

"We'll get the 'dash of yellow' in some other way," he said, quietly, and then the grave look vanished from his face and Polly saw that he was very handsome, though no longer a very young man.

The lady beside him was a tiny brunette, bright and dark and beautiful.

Somehow Polly felt glad when she saw that the haughty little beauty who was still pouting over the loss of her 'dash of yellow,' had no power to stir the great, tender heart that shone through the man's happy blue eyes.

There came to her a feeling that the eyes had not always been shadowless as she saw them now. There were lines in his fair face that must have been left by suffering and sorrow, and the quiet light was such as comes to those who have gone through the valley of sorrow and have mounted the hill on the other side.

Neither of them noticed her. Scraps of their conversation reached her just as the new faces and scenes did.

The pretty girl pouted behind her novel. Polly regarded her just as she would have done the heroine of a story, wondering what she would do next.

Not one moment of the journey was tedious. It was like a chapter in a new and fascinating book. Presently the pretty girl came to Polly.

"I have noticed that you are quite alone. Don't you find it tiresome?" she asked, smiling down brightly.

"Not at all, thank you," Polly said, taking the bundle out of the seat with a little gesture of invitation.

"Then you don't want me to sit with you?"

"I should be very glad to have you. I only meant that I am not tired of the journey. I have been wondering why so many of the passengers complain. It is a habit, don't you think so?"

"In many instances, yes. You have the other habit—that of extracting pleasure from everything."

"It is hardly a habit I think. Besides, it doesn't follow that because I am pleased with this I find pleasure in—"

The pretty girl laughed merrily.

"I see. I quite thought you a philosopher, you know, you are so serene and comfortable under what most people consider trying circumstances. The most amiable people are cross after several days on the cars!"

"Not if traveling is a novel experience," Polly said.

"O, well, it's too much bother. One feels better in a good humor."

Polly smiled and listened as she chatted on. Her voice was sweet, and she spoke in a pretty childish way, that was very charming. She was an inhabitant of the bright world that Polly longed to know. The world of culture and refinement. And she was going into it. She would know such people—they would be her friends—her companions. What the actual environments would be she did not know. The daily life, the small details mattered so little. But she began to think of these as the journey came nearer.

It was not until it was actually ended and stood waiting for someone to claim her that a new uneasiness—a sort of nervous fear seized her.

What would these new people think of her? She remembered now that the letter had not been a cordial one. It had been to her a means of escape. And she had been too glad to take advantage of it to notice the narrowness of the way.

She felt very humble and ashamed and very much alone as she waited. And then someone called her name, and she saw an old negro man, bowing to her.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

### Uses of Salt.

The number of things besides seasoning for which common salt can be used is astonishing.

Salt and water makes a good gargle for a sore throat and an emetic in cases of poisoning.

It is a "mordant" for many colors especially black, and should be used in washing black dress goods, stockings, etc., to keep from fading.

There is no better skin stimulant than a brisk rubbing with salt and water.

Wet salt applied to a bee sting will quickly give relief.

Soap, starch and salt, should be rubbed into spots of mildew on cloth, which can then be restored by placing in the sun for an hour or two.

Salt is a splendid polisher for brass, mixed with vinegar it is a fine polish for mica stove windows; with lemon or cream of tartar it will remove rust from iron or steel.

It aids other solvents, such as benzene, ammonia or alcohol, in removing grease spots, and gives a brilliant white light if a little is dissolved in the kerosene.

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